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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

24 June 1985

Background Brief

Questions on Lebanon's Economic Infrastructure

1. Beirut International Airport (BIA) is by far the most important airfield in Lebanon. It is the home base and hub for Lebanon's civil air carrier, Middle East Airlines (MEA), which has extensive routes throughout the Middle East. It is also the home base for Trans Mediterranean Airlines (TMA), MEA's cargo affiliate. During times of high tension MEA and TMA move the locus of their operations to Kuwait, also using Athens and other European cities. [REDACTED]

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-- Although 15 other international airlines are scheduled to serve BIA, we believe that most of them cancel their flights during periods of fighting or high tension. They are: Aeroflot, Air France, Alia (Jordanian), Alitalia, Balkan Air (Bulgarian), Cyprus Air, Czechoslovak Air, Gulf Air, Iberia, KLM, Lufthansa, Sabena (Belgian), Swissair, Tunis Air, Yugoslav Air. [REDACTED]

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2. Beirut's importance as an international commercial telecommunications center is now minimal. Although it is still the most important center for Lebanon, alternate international routes, including the recently launched ARABSAT satellite, have minimized its importance for other nations of the Middle East.

[REDACTED]

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3. Lebanon has a number of thermal generating plants, mostly located on or near the coast, and some hydroelectric facilities inland. The most important generating plants are thermal power plants at Zouk (Zug Mikail), north of Beirut near Juniyah--currently in Christian territory, and the plant at al Jiyah, north of Sidon--currently held by the Druze. Important electrical substations serving Beirut are at al Judayhah, al

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Luwayzah, al Hadath, and in Beirut itself. For West Beirut, the most important source is probably the Jiyah plant and the most important substation is the one at al Hadath. [REDACTED]

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-- With Beirut, and Lebanon in general, experiencing electrical shortages and blackouts on almost a daily basis, many individuals and businesses have their own generating sets that normally operate on diesel fuel. [REDACTED]

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4. The water system serving Beirut is rudimentary. Water pipes are still operable in some sections of the city, particularly in East Beirut, but much of the water is being trucked into West Beirut. About 75 percent of the supply comes from springs and about 25 percent from wells. There are probably at least 300 private wells in the Beirut area alone. There is a major waterworks about 18 kilometers east of Beirut. We have no specific information on the water pipeline system. [REDACTED]

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-- Cutting the electric supply would cut off most of the private wells and a large portion of the public water supply. [REDACTED]

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5. Lebanon's three major ports are Beirut, Tripoli, and Sidon, with Beirut being by far the most important. Beirut's port facilities are entirely in the Christian sector and probably handle 60 to 70 percent of Lebanon's maritime traffic. There are at least eight other ports dotting the Lebanese coast, mainly operating as illegal ports. The largest illegal port outside Beirut is Juniyah--also in the Christian sector. [REDACTED]

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6. The main north-south coastal highway runs through the eastern Beirut suburbs. There is also a major highway inland to Damascus. Rail links follow the same routes as the major highways mentioned above. The railroads are of minor importance, poorly maintained, and are now largely inoperable. [REDACTED]

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7. The petroleum sector is still under government control, although if necessary, products could be smuggled in through the illegal ports. The three most important facilities are the two refineries at Tripoli (22,000 b/d) and Zahrani (17,000 b/d, between Sidon and Tyre), and the product import and storage facilities in and around the port of Beirut. These port and storage facilities are in the Christian sector. West Beirut would most likely be served by the storage facilities in Beirut and the refinery at Zahrani. The refineries produce about 40 to 45 percent of product consumption with the rest imported. Distribution within the country is primarily by tank trucks operated by private companies. [REDACTED]

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